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ABSTRACT

Geography, wealth and density of populations, prevailing religious beliefs, and educational systems all influenced the evolution of educational tools and methods of instruction in the United States. Due to the practical nature of the early settlers, writing was taught earlier in America than in England, using quill pens and handmade rag pulp paper, and sometimes parchment or vellum made from animal skins. After the American Revolution, paper was made using a mechanical process, but it remained scarce, expensive, and of poor quality. Some students owned slates, but these were not in wide use until the 19th century. It was not until after the 1850s that manufacture of pulpwood paper became a major industry. Engraved copy slips and steel pens, which were in general use by the end of the 19th century, revolutionized writing instruction. Perfected in 1760, the pencil was also in general use by the early 19th century. The hornbook, usually a wooden paddle with the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer printed on paper protected by a transparent layer horn, was the early American child's first textbook. This was followed by a primer such as "The New England Primer," the first American schoolbook. After the introduction in 1836 of the McGuffey reader, which embodied important themes of Christianity and citizenship, few primers survived. This evolution of these instructional materials points out that the present day classroom is not an "invention" but a development centuries in the making. (HTH)

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Historical Developments of Language Arts
Materials in American Schools

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I would like to extend my appreciation to the Arkansas Museum of Natural History and the Territorial Restoration in Little Rock for providing assistance in the research of this paper and for providing items used as visual aids during the actual presentation of the paper.

Textbooks, pens, pencils, and paper are integral parts of an educator's daily life. Yet, most educators know little of the story of the slow evolution of these items and the ways in which successive generations have made new adaptations on their existing tools of instruction. The purpose of this paper is to give a brief historical account of various items and materials used for instruction in early America, specifically those related to the subjects of reading and writing.

It should be noted that the items arbitrarily chosen for discussion are addressed generally; only slight provision is made for geographic area differences, wealth and density of populations, prevailing religious beliefs, or educational systems, all of which influenced educational tools and methods of instruction.

Writing Instruments

The quill pen was used from the dark ages until the mid nineteenth century. The word pen itself is derived from the Latin penna meaning feather. Although commonly made from the third or fourth wing feather of a goose, primary feathers of the raven, turkey, crow, and swan were sometimes used. Feathers were dried first, often in hot sand, and the exterior membrane was removed. The point was sometimes dipped in acid to make it stronger and longer lasting. Quills curve slightly according to whether they are taken from a left or right wing, and it was the writer's choice to have the pen curve outward or inward toward the wrist (Fairbank, 1970).

Lee (1973) reported that writing was taught earlier in America than in England due to the practical nature of the early settlers. Boys and girls were taught to write words and to figure enough to keep accounts.

Quill pens and homemade ink were used. Lee related:

Families made their ink by gathering the bark of the swamp maple, boiling it in an iron kettle until the brew was thick and black, then adding iron sulfate to make it indelible. This ink was uneven and spluttery fluid at best, and given to freezing overnight in the cold of the deserted schoolhouse (one of the early morning duties in winter, along with stoking the fireplace and fanning the blaze, was to thaw out the ink).
(p. 166)

Poke berries and soot obtained from burning fine grained wood or bones were other ingredients used for ink manufacture as reported by Cummins (1979).

When teaching writing the instructor's chief concern was making quill pens and "setting copies" for each pupil. Some teachers never taught pupils to make their own pens. "In the Boston writing schools it was required that this be done when children were twelve years old, but the practice did not follow the rule" (Parker, p. 92).

In the teaching of writing, engraved copy slips and steel pens, which were in general use by the end of the nineteenth century, practically revolutionized the method. No longer did the teacher spend endless hours making quill pens and copy papers; instead the teacher was free to assist, demonstrate and critique.

The paper used in America prior to 1750 was made by hand from rag pulp. Paper gets its name from papyrus, a reed which the ancient Egyptians used for making a writing material. Parchment was sometimes

used for important documents; it was made from the skins of sheep, goats and other animals. Vellum, or fine parchment, was originally made from skins of calves, kids, and lambs. Its production was very laborious, involving removal of the hair or wool, dipping the skin in lime, stretching it on a frame, shaving with a knife and smoothing and softening it with powdered chalk.

After the Revolution paper was made by a mechanical process, but it tended to ruin the fiber. Still, paper remained scarce, expensive and of poor quality; the paper used in the schools tended to be particularly coarse. Those students who had no paper available practiced their writing on the inside of tree bark, typically that of birch. It was not until after the 1850's when chemical processes for producing pulpwood began to appear and, with the softwood resources of the South available, paper manufacture became a major industry (Merzbach, 1971).

Some students were fortunate enough to own slates, which were first gathered from the slate quarries of Vermont. Although known in the Colonial period, slates were not in wide use until the nineteenth century. By 1850 they had become a standard accessory and were not replaced by young scholars until pencil and paper became cheap enough for students' use. Slates cost about forty-four cents, an expensive sum for many rural folks; Abraham Lincoln never owned one and instead worked his sums with charcoal on the back of a wooden spade, whittling away its surface as needed (Lee, 1973). Lee reported that parents and teachers made their own chalk by "adding water to one pound of wheat flour mixed with 5 pounds of Paris white and kneading well" (Lee, p. 173).

Today the pencil is the most widely used tool for writing and drawing. It is somewhat ironic that the lead pencil, as it is commonly

called, contains no lead, but a mixture of graphite, clay and wax. In 1564, a deposit of nearly pure graphite was found in England. The graphite was cut in various shapes, then wrapped in string or small boards to be used as a writing instrument. It wasn't until 1760 that a pencil maker in Nuremberg, Germany, perfected a pencil making process, and by the first quarter of the nineteenth century pencils were in general use in Europe and the United States (Daniels, 1980).

Reading Materials

As noted previously, paper was scarce and expensive until the nineteenth century and had to be used sparingly. The hornbook was used as an adaptation to the problem of paper scarcity, for it protected the paper on which the first lessons of young children were printed. The hornbook was standard equipment in English schools, and its use continued in England and America until the 1800's when books became less expensive.

The hornbook, from which children usually learned their letters, was generally a wooden board shaped like a ping-pong paddle on which was fastened a single sheet of paper covered with a sheet of transparent horn. A hole was often bored through the handle so that it might be strung and hung around a youth's neck or waist belt to prevent its loss. The thin, transparent sheet of horn was used to preserve it from wet or dirty fingers. Andrew Tuer in The History of the Hornbook (1979/1897) stated, ". . .but with the public a horn-book gradually came to mean an alphabetical tablet of any kind whether horn entered into the construction or not" (p. 5). Some extended its meaning to any A B C book or primer.

The beginning lesson of the hornbook was the alphabet. At the beginning of the first line was printed a + as a symbol of the cross of

Christ, reminding each child of Christ who died on the cross for such sinners as he. Thus the first line became known as the Chris-cross row.

When using the hornbook, a fescue, (i.e., a pointer, often a piece of straw, pin, pen, quill, or pointed piece of wood or bone) was used to direct the child. Sometimes the child held it, sometimes the teacher. Printed on the hornbook was typically the alphabet, a syllabary, and The Lord's Prayer. The child was expected to learn the alphabet until it could be repeated back and forth (Brandt, 1980).

Actual instruction was not done collectively, but one by one; each member of the class had to sit quietly and wait until called upon for individual instruction. Throughout the eighteenth century the teacher was "engaged in hearing recitations, testing memory, and keeping order" (Cubberly, 1922, p. 238). This method of rote memorization for instruction dates back to the classical Greek era; there "the job required so little imagination and was so despised that it was usually assigned to a slave" (Brandt, 1980, p. 8). Similarly, teachers in the eighteenth century ". . . were few in number, poor in quality, and occupied but a lowly position on the social scale" (Cubberly, 1922, p. 239). Although the teaching methods may be classified as "unpedagogical" by today's standards, Brandt (1980) noted a steady rise in both male and female literacy occurred in New England during the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. (He attributed the critical rise in literacy to the zeal for learning, however, and not to the educational methodologies used during this period.)

Although many early engravings show alphabetical tablets in use, the horn covered hornbook was never in general use other than in England and America, according to Tuer. He noted that primitive man used horn, and

horn was used in window panes by the Romans and Chinese who made use of its translucent property. The horn was also used in construction of early lanterns (The Oxford English Dictionary notes an alternative alternative etymology, lanthorn, which took into account the horn used as panes). For the hornbook, a thin veneer of ox-horn was cut in spirals and then flattened by means of heat and pressure. These "leaves" were tacked onto the board by rose head tacks and brass strips to cover and protect the paper. Wealthier families had hornbooks which were leather ornamented or decorated with silver or gold filigree.

Although the hornbook had a healthy existence for several centuries, its demise was swift and sure. "When a thing valueless in itself has served its turn, men seem to vie with each other in destroying all trace of its existence. In its later days the humble horn-book was treated with the full measure of contempt lavished on a thing which has served its purpose" (Tuer, 1879/1979, p.6). A note from a stationer dealer, according to Tuer, made mention that his last order for hornbooks came about the year 1799. Twenty years later a gross or two were found in a warehouse and destroyed as useless articles. Few hornbooks have survived until today. Those remaining are rare collectors' items or museum pieces.

After children completed their hornbooks they graduated to the primer, which was often used in conjunction with the hornbook. The New England Primer, published and printed by Benjamin Harris, was the first American schoolbook. Reflecting the paper scarcity of the time, the tiny book measured 3 1/2 by 4 1/2 inches and was constructed of crude brownish paper bound between stout wooden covers. As printing was perfected, pictures were added to the text. The primers contained an alphabet, a much more extensive syllabary than the hornbooks, the Lord's Prayer, and

often a shortened catechism, lists of words, whole numbers, and the names of the books of the Bible. Despite the popularity of the books (over three million were printed) few survive today. Brandt (1980) noted that of thirty-seven thousand copies of a primer printed by Franklin and Hall, only one is known to exist.

By the mid 1800's, the nation was experiencing a growing population, and printing and publishing techniques were changing drastically. It was in 1833 that Cincinnati's Truman & Smith Publishing company invited Catherine Beecher, a prominent local educator, to prepare a new textbook series to be marketed in the West. Because of other commitments, she declined, but suggested that the publishers approach William Holmes McGuffey, who at the time was a professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. McGuffey gladly accepted, producing the first of five volumes in his spare time for the sum of \$1000 (First and Second Readers in 1836, the Primer and Third and Fourth in 1837). Later volumes of the readers were published by the company, and although all bear McGuffey's name, he actually had little to do with the majority of volumes.

The success of the McGuffey Readers was immediate; seven million copies were sold between 1836 and 1850, and total sales eventually reached 122,000,000. The emphasis of the texts, which represented the first major effort at a graded textbook series, was adherence to Christianity, allegiance to country and consideration for others--important themes in a nation filled with 500,000 European immigrants trying to assimilate and learn American ways (Murphy, 1980).

Today the McGuffey readers are experiencing a revitalization. It has been estimated that the number of schools adopting the readers may number in the hundreds (Murphy, 1980), with some districts employing the texts as

a supplement to standard reading series with private schools and church sponsored schools more extensively using the series as a principal text.

Conclusion

Recent national and state historical celebrations have resulted in a resurgence in the study of America's heritage. It is important and significant that educators remain aware of the foundations upon which today's educational systems and the technologies used to provide instruction are based.

It is the hope of the author that classroom teachers will, in a sense, experience the "roots" of their profession through a revitalized interest in the study of historical foundations of education. By so doing, the classroom teachers can incorporate such knowledge into the curriculum for the benefit of their students, increasing their awareness and, perhaps, appreciation for the myriad of materials which are available to them today. Indeed, the reality dawns that the present day classroom is not an "invention" but a development that was centuries in the making.

Education is using and developing new technology at an extraordinary pace, leading one to wonder which invaluable devices present in today's classroom will be absent in the schools of tomorrow.

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